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27.







SOMETHING  
ON  
RUSKINISM;  
WITH A "VESTIBULE" IN RHYME.

BY AN ARCHITECT.

Οὐ τοις λογοις μονοις εγγεγυμνασμένος. *Luc.*

DEFFLUIT SAXIS AGITATUS HUMOR.—*Hor.*



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## PREFACE.

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THIS "Something," which many will call a Nothing, is in fact little more than nothing in comparison with what it would have been had the writer touched upon all the matters which he had noted down as characteristic of Mr. Ruskin's peculiar architectural doctrine, and of his truly unique idiosyncracy.

These few pages do not pretend to exhibit a portraiture of Ruskinism, or anything like one. They amount to no more than a mere *croquis*, presenting some of its more striking traits, and such as can be understood by the general reader; which, prominent as they are, seem nevertheless to have escaped the attention of most of Mr. Ruskin's critics, some of whom appear to have been thrown into ecstacies of rapture by what they have been pleased to relish as eloquence of a superlative as well as a highly original kind.

Yet, however his style may be admired by those to whom his doctrine is matter of indifference, hardly can his opinions be relished by any one class of the architectural profession. They, then, ought to say of the following pages that they are at any rate so-so, and the writer of them will interpret such sentence as a sufficiently favourable one, viz., in the words of Touchstone :—

“ *So-so is good—very good—very excellent good.*”

*April 11th, 1851.*

A

## Rhyming Epistle

to J. RUSKIN, Esq.

BY WAY OF "VESTIBULE."

---

JOHN RUSKIN,

You are, if the truth may be told,  
Most audaciously brave, and alarmingly bold.  
In your merciless rage, man, you strike right and left,  
Till you seem of your senses to be quite bereft.  
You rip up reputations, great names you mow down,  
And ride roughshod over most folks of renown.  
Worse are you than "Newleafe," ay, very much worse,  
Since you care not at all What or Whom you asperse.  
Nor are you, i' faith, over nice and particular  
In choosing your words, when you call "Perpendicular"  
A "detestable" style. Oh fie ! fie for shame !  
Of that style of all others just now to make game,  
When two or three millions upon it we're spending :—  
'Tis really too bad—nay, 'tis downright heart-rending ;

"Tis enough to put people quite out of conceit  
 With the Palace of Westminster,—wonder so great.  
 Then you chop down the "Orders," reduce them to *Two*,  
 So that many must think that the deuce is in you.  
 With a stroke of your pen you demolish Ionic,  
 While poor Sir Bob laughs, but with laughter sardonic,  
 At learning his favourite Order's downfall,  
 'Cause pronounced by you, just no Order at all.  
 His darling Ionic, his chief stock in trade,  
 You most coarsely revile, and most vilely degrade  
 Its capital calling—Oh, horror ! disgrace !  
 An "invention" no less than "exceedingly base."  
 Shop-fronts you like not, but your own fronts are worse,  
 Your "af-fronts" I mean, which will cause some to curse  
 Both you and your books, as of mischief brim-full,  
 Though your rant and your nonsense mere noodles may  
 gull.

Your sneering at shops might be borne ; but, oh dear !  
 You presume at our club-houses also to sneer :  
 Call them "coxcomby feeble," and then off you stalk,  
 Loudly crowing as if you were "Cock of the Walk !"

O Ruskin ! most ruthless, can aught e'er be ruder  
 Than your scurvy remarks on our Old English Tudor ?  
 Our Elizabéthan you cannot endure ;  
 (Compared with St. Mark's, 'tis, I own, not quite pure ;)  
 So with your rough tongue, I suppose you would peck  
 At poor old Bess herself, and the ruff round her neck.  
 Yet, of all styles on earth, John, your own's the most  
 curious,  
 With its unction so canting, and foaming so furious.  
 Your book—since Reviewers so swear—may be rational ;  
 Still, 'tis certainly not either loyal or national ;

York Minster, York Column, come in for a scratch  
 Of your critical claws, for which neither's a match.  
 " *Confectioner's Gothic* " in one you behold,  
 And see round the other " *a large sausage* " roll'd.

"Tis a wonder, you Wretch, in your spite and your  
 malice,  
 You did not fall foul upon Buckingham Palace ;  
 THAT's, however, quite safe from your jeers and your  
 sallies ;  
 Such pile is impregnable to all your criticism,  
 Your artillery of thunder, or your small shot of witticism ;  
 So noble, so grand, with such gusto designed,  
 In style so imposing, in taste so refined.  
 Though you had not the grace to extol and applaud,  
 At least you were by 't into decency awed ;  
 Else—what is more likely—were by it so *scared*,  
 That you scampered away and your thunder-bolts spared,  
 Opining that, so far from thunder, 'twas not  
 Worth even so much as mere " *powder and shot*. "

Of Professors themselves you have not the least fear,  
 Since " Friend " Cockerell for one you have ventured to  
 queer ;  
 As to great Welby Pugin, you do not spare him,  
 For you pluck, then expose him in pitiful trim.  
 " Of architects smallest," you call him : Good gracious !  
 That will surely make Pugin quite wroth and pugnacious ;  
 Such a dressing he'll give, you'll never need more  
 Have recourse to a tailor or enter his door.

I really was in a great fright more than once,  
 Lest you should Mister Bunning show up as a dunce :

Laugh at Donald's small Son deck'd with medal of gold,  
And the Institute call a mere silly sheepfold.

For Hosking I quailed, for Gwilt I quite quaked,  
Lest both should be pluck'd by you and turn'd out naked.

So many you strip of their *leafage* and laurels,  
That you are likely to get into plenty of quarrels :  
On Fergusson's system, for one thing, you've pounced,  
And as quite " illogical " being denounced.  
You " schoolmaster " Garbett with chiding and snubbing,  
For which he, perhaps, will now give you a drubbing.  
In short, you make blockheads of every one,  
And so some will show fury while others show fun,—  
Will laugh at your bluster—repay it with banter,  
Protesting you ride the great horse in a *canter* ;  
Since cant, " Kata-Phusin," you certainly do  
About Nature, till folks for a Natural take you.

Of eloquence you, John, no doubt are the model,  
Wherefore more is the pity you deal so in twaddle :  
For twaddle you do in such singular style,  
That although we are chafed we cannot but smile.  
With your queer Stones of Venice you may make a fuss,  
Yet why should you savagely fling them at us ?  
O great LITHOBOLIC ! to you 't may be frolic,  
But to us it is very far worse than the cholic.  
Tho' Reviewers have graciously hailed you in form,  
From Pugin and others look out for a storm ;  
Their *hail* will be different, for 'twill not flatter you—  
More likely 'twill be both to bruise and to batter you.

While you rail at deceptions, you deal in deceit,  
As most of your titles with that are replete.

You hang out lying signs to entice people in,  
 Which is surely a shame—or you'd call it a *sin*.  
 “*Sheepfolds*” is a falsehood, my truth-loving chap,  
 Since that title to catch the unwary's a trap.  
 Oh fie ! Johnny Ruskin, to such tricks so stoop,—  
 The public deceive so, your readers so dupe !  
 Most surely your own Lamp of Truth has gone out,  
 Unless you have sent it, perhaps “*up the spout* ;”—  
 Else would you not deal in such fibbing as that,  
 And gull us with “ white lies,” tho' pithy and pat.

Your style is so soaring—and some it makes sore—  
 That plain folks can't make out your strange mystical  
 lore ;  
 For rest well assured, my most eloquent Rusky,  
 That, if brilliant your language, your meanings are dusky.  
 Your mystical stuff is so grandly sublime  
 That we pygmies can't up to the sense of it climb.  
 Oft you mount to the clouds, perhaps searching for  
 thunder,  
 And for bolts that will shatter our systems asunder—  
 Will *all* Renaissance crush, Anglo-Gothic abash,  
 And involve every school in one general crash.

Your next flight, perhaps,—and ah ! may it be soon,—  
 Will bear you aloft to the “ Stones” of the Moon ;  
 So should you your senses there happen to find  
 Among other things *lost* here on earth ; prithee mind,  
 That when you return, you don't leave them behind :  
 With which sound advice this epistle I close,  
 For now, quitting rhyme, we must come to plain prose.



## RUSKINISM.

---

WHERE apology would partake of impertinence, it is better to dispense with it than to offer it. Most assuredly none is required for canvassing the merits and qualifications of one who appears to set himself up as an Oracle in all matters of Art—at least, has got the character of being such. Or, if such inquiry be at all presumptuous, Mr. Ruskin himself is the very last person in the world who can, with any sort of decency, complain of its presumptuousness, whatever his particular admirers may do ; since he has presumed to utter a great many unjustifiable assertions, not only in a dictatorial tone, but in a very offensive and scornful manner. A modern Jupiter Tonans, he fulminates his thunderbolt epithets to fall upon and instantly crush entire styles and schools of architecture in one indiscriminate ruin, as if nothing less than their utter extermination could appease his wrath against them.

He himself deals too much in the grand "*qu'il meurt*" style, and more than once has recourse to the despotic emphasis of, "Off with his head ! so much for Buckingham." After such fashion is it that he pronounces sentence, with most convenient brevity, upon our English Perpendicular as "detestable," and upon the whole of the art

of the Renaissance, (taking that term in its most comprehensive signification,) as “pestilent!” How far that same thunderbolt sort of criticism may have contributed to Mr. Ruskin’s popularity, as a writer on art, it is not easy to determine. Some, perhaps, relish the fun of it, taking his bolts to be only mere bounce, and his popularity itself to be of rather popgun quality—mere *vox et praetera nihil*.

If popular he really be, his popularity has been thrust upon him; for most assuredly he cannot be charged with having sought it by toadying to general tastes, or by flattering respectable prejudices. However popular, too, he may be as a mere preacher, as a teacher he is eminently unsuccessful, since no one seems to have profited or cared to profit by his doctrine, or to be scared by his denunciations. What he has said in his “Lamp of Sacrifice” has not induced a single lady to part with her jewels, nor prevailed upon any one to desist from incurring “useless expense, in unnotted fineries or formalities; cornicings of ceilings, graining of doors, and fringing of curtains, and thousands such;—things on whose common appliance hang whole trades.” Notwithstanding this impressive homily of Mr. Ruskin’s, those things and the trades dependent on them do not appear to have received the slightest check, in consequence. On the contrary, almost every one is now looking hopefully forward to their being encouraged more than ever, the main and professed purpose of the Great Exhibition being to give a stimulus to manufactures and the industrial arts, and to all the appliances of ornamentation. It is somewhat remarkable, too, that the Exhibition scheme was first brought forward very soon after Mr. Ruskin’s Lamps had begun to enlighten us, and had become the

delight of reviewers and journalists ; not, however, their light, for they showed themselves to be as much in the dark as ever.

It is possible that Prince Albert may be charmed with Mr. Ruskin's "eloquence ;" but that he is no convert to his doctrine is as certain as it is that Mr. Ruskin is no admirer of such architecture and taste as we have in Buckingham Palace. Because, had his Royal Highness thought as the author of the *Lamps* does, he would not have thought of the Exhibition ; or, had the idea nevertheless presented itself to him, he would have dismissed it at once as incompatible with the interests of genuine art, and a conscientious taste for it. There would have been no Crystal Palace, nor would Mr. Paxton have been "hurraed" by all the "little boys" of the newspapers, and hailed as the originator of an entirely new system of architecture, merely because, sticking to the proverb of "Nothing like leather," he fancied the liker a conservatory the better, and accordingly proposed that we should build "a greenhouse larger than ever greenhouse was built before." "Which thought," says Ruskin, "and some very ordinary algebra are as much as all that glass can represent of human intellect ;"—a dictum far more likely to be approved of by professional men than almost any other put forth by him in his "Stones of Venice."

Setting aside those opinions of his which militate more or less strongly against various interests, Mr. Ruskin must by his last work have rendered himself especially obnoxious to the members of the architectural profession, one and all. In that one-sidedness—or want of Catholic feeling for art—which seeks to extol the merits of one particular style or school, by depreciating another, there may be astute policy, at least. Thus classical archi-

tecture may be exalted by speaking (as Klenze has done) of the "stupendous barbarisms of the middle ages," or setting down Gothic as a mere "monkish and gloomy" mode of building. Or, *vice versa*, the antique system with its orders, and the modern one thence derived, may be reprobated as being not merely un-English, but Pagan to boot, and scandalously at variance with "the faith of our forefathers." In either case, the credit lost with one party is more than made up for by that gained with the *Ultras* on the opposite side. Mr. Pugin, for one, has acted upon such policy most successfully, having established himself in the opinion of the public generally as the equally able and zealous champion of Gothic and Mediæval Art. Though he and his followers are likely to stand quite dismayed at finding him now pronounced by Mr. Ruskin so far from being "a great architect" as to be the "smallest possible or conceivable architect."

For saying that, however much they might have been astonished at Mr. Ruskin's excessive boldness of speech, many of the profession, it may be suspected, would very readily have forgiven him; and though they would not have applauded openly, would have chuckled in their sleeve. But he has unfortunately said so many other things besides, altogether the reverse of complimentary to the present race of architects,—or indeed, to all the architecture and architects of the last three centuries and more,—that the entire body cannot but regard him as a common enemy, and a "malevolent" of the worst description. What makes matters worse is, his injurious opinions will find their way among a greatly more extensive class of readers than that which usually takes interest in architectural teaching and criticism.

When the public find Mr. Ruskin denouncing all our

architectural doings alike, as “the idiocies of the present day,”—“our stunted Grecian, and stucco Romanism, into which they (architects) are now forced to shape their *palsied thoughts*,” &c., they will be apt to take him at his word, since he of course must understand the matter infinitely better than they can possibly do. Nor—to confess the honest truth—is it to be denied that “idiocy” of design, or “palsied thought,” or else the no-thought of piddling “plagiarism,” do exhibit themselves plainly enough in some of our recent structures, those, moreover affording more than every-day opportunities for the exercise of talent. Mr. Ruskin might have pointed to the Coal Exchange as exemplifying idiocy, to the British Museum as representative of palsied thought and stunted Grecian, and to some of the Pall Mall Club-houses—nay to Cliefden also—as so many proofs of plagiarism, betraying indolence, if not incapacity also, and the miserable jackdaw ambition of figuring in borrowed plumes; or rather stolen ones, for those who borrow in that way never repay, they being no better than insolvent debtors.

Now Mr. Ruskin might have said as much as this and a great deal more, and at any rate it would have been known against what or whom his missiles were directed; whereas now he has flung at random in all directions. Or he may be said to have made a general onslaught; perchance to have attempted the part of Samson, hoping to slay thousands with no other weapon than the *jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps*. The tornado, the volcano, the earthquake, are the types of devastation which Mr. Ruskin seems to have proposed to himself, out of his ultra passion for imitating nature and its phenomena. Angelic he may be, but it is in the character of a destroying angel. Traditional glories perish at his touch;

reputations and authorities melt into thin air. That *Treble-U* or triumvirate of V's, Vitruvius, Vasari, Vignola, are deposed, besides a countless host of other architectural legislators, writers, and critics, who, smitten with *pestilence*, are consigned by him to one vast lazarette. Their doctrine is likely to become a dead letter, and their books only so much waste paper. Of that there can be little doubt, since Mr. Ruskin confidently assures us that "we shall get rid of Chinese pagodas and Indian temples, and Renaissance Palladianisms and Alhambra stucco and filigree, *in one great rubbish heap* ; and shall not need to trouble ourselves about their expression or anything else concerning them."

As to Chinese pagodas and Indian temples, Persepolitan palaces included, we may fling them away upon "the rubbish heap," nothing loth ; rather most readily and cheerfully, they belonging to the province of the student of ethnology and archaeology, infinitely more than to that of the architect, whose attention may be greatly better directed, and his application much more usefully bestowed than upon inquiries, which, instead of leading to anything practical, are apt to divert him from matters of immediate interest and importance, and not at all of less importance because of every-day recurrence and application.

Instead of exercising imagination in endeavouring to shape out upon paper such edifices as Persepolitan palaces from their still existing dead bones, it would be —now, alas ! *would have been*—far more sensible in us to secure a masterly design for Buckingham Palace, at least for the new portion of it, which does not say much for "Victorian architecture," or the architectural talent among us now in the middle of this so-much-lauded

nineteenth century, except the *much* be to our national discredit in matters of Art ; although that discredit has rather been inflicted upon the nation, than knowingly and wilfully incurred by it.

As to Renaissance, we really cannot afford to let that be flung upon the Ruskinian rubbish heap. That it in itself contains a great deal of rubbish must be conceded ; yet do not let us on that account fling it all away, for it also contains much that is precious—much more that is useful. It requires to be well sifted, after which we may throw away the base refuse and dross as being not only useless but worse. Renaissance—taking the term in its most comprehensive meaning—is at all events an established style ; nay, a universal one as regards the whole of Europe during the last two or three centuries, and the extra-European civilization of other countries in recent times. Even our modern would-be purely Greek architecture cannot dispense with Renaissance ideas and *motifs*. Of all systems, that of the Renaissance, and what has grown up out of it, is the most copious and the most ductile. It accommodates itself far more readily than any other to all the various requirements of the present day ; adapts itself to buildings of every grade ; and is both freely susceptible of fresh *impressions*, and capable of giving utterance to novel *expressions* also. Columniation, fenestration, arcuation, in all their varieties, and either singly or combined, are at its command. It gives us the dome, the campanile, and either simple unbroken masses, or the most piquant arrangements of composition and plan. For domestic architecture, whether it be in town or country, it is far more generally appropriate and applicable than any other style, if only because, even when

stripped so bare as to exhibit scarcely anything of style at all, it has the negative merit of being not unpleasing, provided the forms themselves are well proportioned and well adjusted. What constitutes style may be almost entirely dropped without producing deformity; which is not the case with Gothic, not even the plainest.

At any rate, what it pleases Mr. Ruskin to vituperate as the “pestilent” Renaissance has taken root among us so firmly that it is hopeless to think of eradicating it, and hardly less than futile to think of supplanting it. Wherefore, indeed, should we seek to do either, when it affords us a most desirable *Nov sū*—a standing-place, with a path open before us that has been pioneered and cleared for us by the artists of the 15th and 16th centuries, some of their followers included? Why should we give up that vantage-ground out of complaisance to Mr. Ruskin or Mr. Pugin,—who, curiously enough, sympathize with each other in their hatred of all modern architecture, although antagonistic in opinion upon every other point? The question might be spared, since it is put merely as a *façon de parler*; yet it is here thrown out to exercise the ingenuity of those who pin their faith upon Mr. Ruskin’s off-hand and ill-considered *ipse dixits*.

We Englishmen have reason to be grateful to that same “pestilent” Renaissance, for it has given us St. Paul’s, and Greenwich Hospital—neither of them faultless, but as yet unsurpassed in *grandiosity* by anything of the kind in this country; for, in comparison with the Hospital, Buckingham Palace looks positively dowdy and *mesquin*—neither queenly nor princely; while Mr. Barry’s “elaboration” work on the left bank of the Thames is eclipsed, with regard to effect, by the superior impressiveness of the architectural assemblage of build-

ings on the right bank, at Greenwich,—which, after all, is the right bank for architects to trust to and draw upon.

That instances of the most flagrantly bad taste, and of the grossest architectural vices and solecisms, are to be met with in Renaissance, and even in the works of those who have, upon the whole, shown themselves to be some of the ablest masters in it, is not to be denied. But go to that style for its merits, not its defects ; and all the more glaring the latter are, all the more easily may they be perceived and avoided. When it is said *Go* ; it is not meant “*Go and stick fast there*,” but “*Go thither and then go onward* ;” as will hardly be difficult for any one who has, by thoughtful artistic study, familiarized himself with the gusto and true flavour of the style. *Gusto*, it is to be feared, is a term seldom if ever heard in the architect’s office, where, it is further to be apprehended, there is the very minimum of artistic training ; which is to be regretted, because, although the “Office” turns out shrewd men of business and traders, the nation requires, occasionally at least, works conceived in the spirit of the accomplished artist ; and as such talent is not, it would seem, always to be found just when wanted, it must put up with such miserable “*cut and dry*” design as that of the British Museum, which might have been produced by a mere tyro, *stans pede in uno*, or by any incapable or incapable, favoured, and allowed to do his best or his worst, by “*the powers that be*.” We confide—or what amounts to the same thing—allow some of the most important architectural opportunities to be confided to such creatures as a Smirke and a Blore ; and are content to look on tamely while jobbery and incapacity are at work, and mischief is being perpetrated, even though we our-

selves have to pay for the wretched architectural abortions inflicted upon us to our disgrace.

Were not Mr. Ruskin completely *in nubibus*, he might have found ample matter for his eloquence, by freely animadverting upon, and boldly protesting against, the systematic mismanagement which seems to constitute all that there is of systematic and consistent method in the conducting our government buildings, or similarly important works. Stratagem that sometimes amounts to duplicity, maudlin cajolery, paltry finessing, intriguing and jobbery, have ere now been allowed to carry on their game with impunity. Opportunity after opportunity has been flung away in the most reckless manner, and millions have in the course of a century or less been squandered away in first building up costly abortions, and then either pulling them down again, or in patching and botching them again and again, till at last we get a conglomeration of blunders, instead of the single original one.

The *zigzag* course of proceeding has been practised so long in such matters, and with such unhappy results, that we should do well to abandon it now, and adopt the opposite one of straightforwardness,—were it only for the sake of a change, especially as no change could be for the worse.

Had he taken up this topic, and descended upon it in an article in his appendix, Mr. Ruskin might have been eloquent to some purpose,—not a remote but an immediate one, not a fanciful but a practical one. While gifted with such far-seeing ken as he appears to be, he would have had no difficulty in detecting the current of mistake and mischief, he would hardly have been deterred by any false delicacy from marching up to the fountain-head,

and giving us plainly to understand what unwholesome stuff must be expected from so impure and muddy a source. It may be suspected, however, that Mr. Ruskin is not at all the man to attack and expose practical abuses, or, indeed, to attack anything at all in hand-to-hand combat. He flings his missiles right and left with a most flourishing air of bravery ; and then, like Collins's "Fear,"

He back recoils, he knows not why,  
E'en at the *hits* himself has made.

Never does he come to the point,—certainly never sticks to it, never grapples with it in earnest. Like the "Naughty Boy" in *Punch*, who chalked "No Popery" on Wiseman's street door and then scampered away at full speed, so does Mr. Ruskin fly off in a tangent, and generally, too, flies so high up into the air, and soars so loftily above the *terra firma* of common sense, that we plain mortals cannot possibly attempt to follow him in excursions that seem directed *moon-wards*. From the moon it surely was that he fetched his "Seven Lamps," or else lighted them there ; for they give out a good deal of mere *moonshine*, mixed with something like *lunacy* also. It may safely be left to the reader to decide for himself, whether the following be not a choice specimen of lunacy and moonshine wrapped-up together. Speaking (at page 307 of the *Stones of Venice*) of one of the cornices shown in Plate XVI., he says :—"The cornice *f* represents Heathenism and Papistry, animated by the mingling of Christianity and nature. The good in it, the life of it, the veracity and liberty of it, such as it has, are Protestantism in its heart; the rigidity and saplessness are the Romanism of it. It is the mind of *Fra Angelico*

in the monk's dress—Christianity before the Reformation."

Now "what funny fal-lal is all this!" as George Wightwick\* said in the *Architect* concerning Mr. Ruskin's mode of "convicting" the Greek fret "of ugliness." According to such notable mode of interpretation almost any one thing might easily be made to "represent" any other thing; and Wiseman's legs in his Cardinal's stockings might be said to "represent" a couple of boiled lobsters, and that the *scarlet* complexion of his understandings was owing to his having popped into *hot water*. We would engage to produce "representations," *à la* Ruskin by the score any day, and those not at all more ridiculous, though infinitely more laughable; mouse-traps, for instance, "represent" nunneries far more accurately than Ruskin's wonderful cornice "represents" what his most marvellous *clairvoyance* beholds in it.

All this is mere fooling, it will be said: granted, most potent, grave reader—reverend also or not as may happen—still, as every schoolboy can tell you, *dulce est desipere in loco*, and this is the *in loco*, or place where I have let my pen take a few friskings. And between my fooling and Ruskin's there is this difference—that while mine is mere vivacity and fun, his is intended to be understood seriously, notwithstanding that it is likely to excite the risible muscles of a great many.

At any rate, as far as pleasantry—be it either bad or

\* It is evident that Mr. Ruskin does not care to come to close quarters with Mr. Wightwick, for he does not so much as even once mention him in "The Stones," or its Appendix, although he there *schoolmasters* both Mr. Fergusson and Mr. Garbett at considerable length, and with considerable latitude also.

good—is concerned, far greater latitude and license are allowable in a literary brochure akin to an article in one of the Quarterlies, than would be consistent with the general tone of such didactic theorizing as the author of the “Seven Lamps” and the “Stones of Venice” deals in. Humour is accordingly eschewed by Mr. Ruskin, albeit he has in one or two instances made some attempts at it, as where he compares the base of the York Column to a “large sausage!” and perpendicular panelling to “the reticulations of a mason’s sieve.” Yet, although he cannot be accused of excess on the score of playfulness—which, to say the truth, is not at all his forte,—he plays with his subject so continually and to such degree, that, instead of appearing to be in earnest and really solicitous to expound his doctrine clearly and popularly, he seems actually to take pains to seal it up from ordinary readers, whether professional persons or others, by the mysticism and metaphysical subtleties, the far-fetched and even whimsical analogies, with which he has obscured while pretending to elucidate it.

The object of the first volume of his “Stones of Venice”—which bears the second very whimsical title of “The Foundations,”—is to expound to the uninitiated the component parts of buildings and their elementary forms; and, no doubt, also to present to professional men a more philosophical course of such preparatory study than that now followed. Yet, instead of giving us a perspicuous common-sense rationale of architecture, based upon æsthetic principles, and divested of what is little better than claptrap and cant—which should be left to those who are fain to deal in twaddle—more or less learned and pompous, yet no better than twaddle after all, even though it be delivered *ex cathedrâ* and *ex officio*;—instead

of giving us, I say, such a rationale of the art, Mr. Ruskin creates far more difficulties than he removes. If he be less technical in his language than others, he is infinitely more unintelligible—so sublimely mystical at times (as has already been shown) as to be incomprehensible. It may be suspected, therefore, that he has seated himself upon two stools, and that he—or his book at least—will fall to the ground, though it will probably be picked up and be preserved as a literary curiosity. The uninitiated, or “general readers,” will reject it after all as too *technical*, and as very hard reading indeed. The initiated and professionals, on the other hand, will openly object to it, as well they may, on the score of its being full of fancies and “*fa-l-lals*,” of crotchets and mere rigmarole; and they will secretly dislike and oppose it on account of its being altogether adverse to all their present lore and practice, and because it is moreover calculated to lessen them in the eyes of the public, since those who become converts to Mr. Ruskin’s opinions must henceforth regard as “*detestable*” much that they had before been taught to admire, or at least to pretend to do so. In fact, the public must be, or ought to be put as much out of conceit with all the *architecture* of the present day, as their Oracle himself is.

Nay, Mr. Ruskin is either so intrepid or so incautious, that he throws out the most offensive and sarcastic remarks against the profession, even when he is seeking to bring them over to his own views. “Let me assure them [architects] at least,” he says, “that I mean to be their friend, although they may not immediately recognise me as such. If I could obtain the public ear, and the principles I have advocated were carried into general practice, porphyry and serpentine would be given them instead of limestone and brick; instead of tavern and shop fronts,

they would have to build goodly churches and noble dwelling-houses ; and for every stunted Grecism and stucco Romanism, into which they are now forced to shape their palsied thoughts, and to whose crumbling plagiarisms they must trust their doubtful fame, they would be asked to raise whole streets of bold, and rich, and living architecture, with the certainty in their hearts of doing what was honourable to themselves, and good for all men.”  
(*Stones of Venice*, p. 392.)

We have here a great deal of *unction*, and a few drops of *oil* of vitriol into the bargain ; but what is the plain barefaced English of it, when stripped of rhetorical masking ? Why, just this :—

“ You architects seem to look upon me very suspiciously, as one who is disseminating doctrines more or less at variance with your own personal interests ; yet assure yourselves that I am your friend—aye, your very best friend ; and, therefore, take a friend’s privilege of advising you for your good, and telling you of your faults. Excuse my bluntness, when I assure you that you are at present very little better than a set of block-heads, and such will remain, unless you consent to be guided entirely by me,—to discard your present mistaken views of Art and erroneous opinions and tastes, and embrace my new philosophy of Architecture. I must deal plainly with you—for it won’t do to mince matters in so desperate a state of things—so assure you that your thoughts are all palsy-stricken ; and all your productions convict you of pitiful plagiarism, and paltry petty larceny. Aye, you may well hang down your heads ; but come, take comfort : do you and the public only adopt my theories, and carry them into practice, and all shall yet go well. For materials, you shall get porphyry and

serpentine—perhaps lapis lazuli to boot—instead of base brick and vulgar stone. Instead of shop-fronts, and palaces of very shoppish physiognomy, ye shall be called upon to rear whole streets of real living architecture; whereas ye have hitherto all along dealt in mere mimicries and mockeries."

Such style of inviting the profession to embrace doctrines and views which would require them to unlearn a very great deal, and to become Mr. Ruskin's docile pupils, is not particularly well calculated to win him their suffrages and good favour. It is true, the promises he makes them are magnificent enough; but who will answer for the solvency of a promise-maker upon so extravagantly liberal a scale? Where is all the porphyry and serpentine to come from, that are to banish stone and brick? or where is that "living architecture" to come from, that is all at once to supersede every one of the styles which we now practise, and which he denounces? He certainly does clear the way for an entirely new style, because he demolishes, at least puts under ban, and would extirpate, those now in use. A fresh style of architecture, however, cannot be conjured up by merely evoking it; not though the evocation should be enforced by all the caballistic words which Mr. Ruskin has at his command. Neither does he himself pretend to shape out any definite style that would be not only of distinctly novel character, but especially adapted to the habits and exigencies of modern society; nor is it possible for any one else to shape out such "living" style from his precepts—if any positive precepts at all can be eliminated from doctrine wrapped up in vagueness and obscurity, and rendered all the more obscure by being dressed up with so much

sickly garnish of *Missy* and *Minerva*-Press sentimentality.

Mistaking, perhaps, the reverse of wrong for right, Mr. Ruskin has sought to recommend himself to the public, by treating his subject in a fashion directly contrary to that of almost all writers upon architecture. So, because they are almost without exception ploddingly technical, prosaic, and dull, he sets up for being highly imaginative and poetical, *coûte qui coûte*, and seems to consider intelligibility and meaning as of quite secondary importance, in comparison with verbal *attitudinizing*, for telling effect.

Nevertheless, other writers may take a lesson from him, not by aping his worst points—among which are his sentimental flourishes and extravagancies—but by endeavouring to accommodate themselves to the intelligence, generally, of well informed readers, willing to be instructed and capable of being interested in subjects unfamiliar to them, provided they are treated of in an intelligent and interesting manner.

Unfortunately, the very reverse of such manner seems to have been adopted, and pertinaciously adhered to, by all architectural writers, from Vitruvius downwards; for they have addressed themselves only to their own class, or that of *professionals*, who, if anything at all can be derived from it, must of necessity read and wade through what others would not unjustly pronounce to be unreadable. Fatal mistake that; since so far is it from partaking of true policy, or clever tact, that it rather betrays what, in the language of Mr. Ruskin, might be called veritable “idiocy.” Akin to it, likewise, is that of architects themselves as a class, who, instead of endeavouring to facilitate the study of their ART, and

render it as attractive as possible to every one, have with most unaccountable "anserous" and suicidal stupidity, given the public to understand that scarcely any one can be a competent judge of architecture who is not practically acquainted with all the manifold operations of building. As a specimen of *bêtise*, such notion, supposing it to be a sincere one, would be merely laughable; for it is similar to declaring that only poets can properly understand and enjoy poetry, and only cooks, cookery. Even were such really the case, it would be indiscreet on the part of cooks to give the public to understand as much. Nor is it more discreet in architects to hint, as they are apt to do, that their Art can hardly be fairly appreciated and relished by those who do not actually practise it. That Architecture can be but imperfectly enjoyed by those who have given no study to it, is undeniable. What then? the study of a Fine Art, as *Art*, is altogether distinct, consequently, separable from that which is indispensable to those who follow any art of the kind, professionally. Were architects more ingenuous than they seem to be, they would readily admit this; and were they somewhat less blind to their own interest as a class, and to that of their Art, they would earnestly invite the public, *i. e.* non-professionals, to apply even diligently to the study of the latter. So long as persons in general continue in their present ignorance of architecture, it is hopeless to expect that it can be properly encouraged; for where is the intelligence and judgment to come from that would enable people to do so?

Writing as he does for the public rather than the profession, it might have been supposed that Mr. Ruskin would endeavour to point out clearly the difference between Building and Architecture—the first of which

might be called *tecture* and the other *calo-tecture*. Calo- or kalotecture, includes the idea of tecture, together with something more, namely, artistic beauty—the aim at it, if not always the realization of it. In like manner, as we may have clothing without also having what is understood by the term dress, so may we have excellent tecture, without having what deserves the name of architecture—that is, aesthetic tecture, or kalotecture. The utility of a thing is one matter, and its beauty quite another; nor does the latter at all enhance the former, though it should appear to be motived by it. Utility has to be studied first, beauty superadded to it afterwards; it is so that architectural styles have developed themselves out of mere utilitarian beginnings, nor can it possibly be otherwise.

Surely this explanation is intelligible enough; removes all difficulties, and clears away all misconception as to the relation in which building and architecture stand to each other: whereas Mr. Ruskin's speculations serve only to make that which was before obscure completely opaque. Among other notable crochets of his, is the dividing the art into "Architecture of Protection," and "Architecture of Position"! the former of which, he says, "includes the architecture of the hut and sheepfold." 'Tis a pity he had not occasion to speak of day-book and ledger literature. At any rate, if huts and sheepfolds are to be accounted as belonging to architecture, we need not scruple to rank "the graining of doors" as a legitimate though humble branch of pictorial art, notwithstanding that Mr. Ruskin is particularly wroth against it. Moreover, when he was about it, he might with equal propriety have given a third class, viz., the architecture of motion—one that embraces all vehicular

constructions, from the royal state carriage to a butcher's cart. *Coach-builders* have surely as much right to be looked upon as dealing in architecture, as those who confine their practice to making hovels and sheepfolds.

Professors of architecture will probably pray to be protected from his "Architecture of Protection," as mixing up them and their art with exceedingly low and vulgar associates. Still more forcibly will they protest against his doctrine with regard to the orders, of which he insists upon our henceforth acknowledging only *Two*; and he puts the distinction between them into an exceeding small compass. Taking no account of any of the other circumstances respectively characteristic of an order, he merely draws an imaginary line from the top of the shaft to the lower edge of the abacus, and accordingly as the general contour of the body of the capital swells out convexly beyond that line, or recedes within it concavely, he sets down the order as Doric or Corinthian. How then does he contrive to bring in the Ionic Order? Instead of bringing it in, he boldly throws it out, deciding that it is no order at all; and pronouncing its capital to be "an exceedingly base invention"—for which many will pronounce him a most base and barbarous critic. One comfort, however, is, that the very extravagance of his views and opinions renders them harmless, no one being likely to fall into and adopt them.

As to Mr. Ruskin's doctrine in general, were it ever so sound in principle, ever so rational as theory, it is so eminently unsuited to this country at the present juncture, that it could not be adopted and acted upon to any extent without disturbing a great many matters. While he himself runs counter to almost everybody else, no less

in his extraordinary likings than in his violent dislikings and fierce antipathies, the views which he preaches up are not at all in accordance with the spirit of the age, or our social tendencies. Possibly, Mr. Ruskin may be in the right, and nearly everybody else may be in the wrong—as is, in fact, insinuated by those complaisant Reviewers who have praised his architectural writings, as being no less “practical” than valuable. They have omitted, however, to apprise their readers, as they were surely in mere common honesty bound to do, that those same writings contain very much that both contradicts and is contradicted by our present tastes and practices;—that Mr. Ruskin condemns all that we have hitherto been taught to look up to and admire, and which his own admirers and puffers would very likely profess to admire still, did any occasion for mentioning it happen to come in their way.

Such gentry can of course shut their eyes to whatever it is inconvenient for them to notice; but readers, who are not reviewers also by profession—which latter class are not always the most diligent readers—can hardly fail to perceive that Ruskinism is violently inimical to sundry existing interests, and seeks to bring them, in the first instance, into contempt. It scruples not to reprobate, in the most unqualified terms, what has hitherto been hailed as improvement, and regarded as one of the most meritorious as well as striking characteristics of modern civilization, namely,—the greater facility and increase of industrial productions, in consequence of the substitution of machinery and mechanical execution for manual labour; which latter, besides being more tardy and operose, is more unequal also.

Be it matter for self-congratulation or regret, a manufacturing people we are, and are indebted for much of our prosperity as a nation to our manufactures, and for our superiority in them to our improved processes and superior machinery, by means of which the cost of production is reduced to a minimum.

Mr. Ruskin however reprobates, in the most unqualified manner, the employment of machinery or mechanical processes ; at least, in whatever appertains to architecture and ornamental design. He appears to set a high value on manual labour, difficulty of production, and corresponding expensiveness, for their own sakes ; wherein he runs into a faulty extreme, the reverse of the prevalent error, which encourages a system of cheapness, or rather, nominal cheapness, incompatible with fair remuneration to the producer, unless he happen to be a monopolizer also, or with goodness of quality in the articles themselves.

In his usual oracular fashion, Mr. Ruskin declares "machine ornaments," or all such as are not produced solely by the workman's hand, to be "no ornaments at all." According to him, whatever is produced by machine, mould, die, stamp, or other method of the kind, ought to be scouted as paltry, mechanical, and unartistic. It must be admitted, that to the immediate executor or operative no other merit attaches than that of common ability in his practice ; but to imagine that the work itself must therefore be unartistic and uneesthetic is a most strange, almost unpardonable, mistake on the part of one who sets himself up not only for a critic of the first magnitude, but for an infallible oracle in all matters of art. With a bit of wax, any child can take an impression

from a seal ; and if there be any beauty of design in the seal itself the impression will exhibit it, let it be taken by whomsoever it may.

Now that ought to settle the matter, though not in favour of Mr. Ruskin ; for, *mutatis mutandis*, the argument derived from that instance applies to all work exhibiting design, which is produced by "machinery," or any of the other methods above alluded to. Even Mr. Ruskin himself has thought advisable now to qualify his former too sweeping assertion, by admitting, in a note at page 393 of his "Stones of Venice," that—"Of course mere multiplicability, as of an engraving, does not diminish the intrinsic value of the work." Undoubtedly : wherefore then should he object so virulently against the same means of facile multiplicability being resorted to for ornamental details in architecture—at any rate, for such as are so situated that they cannot possibly do more than contribute to general effect ? Finish up as highly as you please, where such finish can be examined and appreciated ; but to bestow just the same painstaking carefulness of execution upon a cornice or ceiling, thirty feet or upwards, perhaps, above the floor—as upon a chimney-piece that can be closely inspected in all its minutiae—is surely no better than preposterous wastefulness. What would look coarse in the chimney-piece would show as delicate upon the ceiling ; and the same remark applies to the whole of what it pleases Mr. Ruskin to call "unnoticed fineries ;" and which, being such, it surely can matter very little as to the how by which they are produced.

Oracle as he is, or affects to be, in art, John Ruskin shows himself to be no more than a minute verbal critic in architecture. Though he dwells somewhat tediously,

and with petty myopic vision upon mere details, as details, he does not show any comprehensive grasp of architectural design with regard to *ensemble*. Now, all the details of a building may be irreproachable, and the building itself be nevertheless quite the reverse of satisfactory ; or, even in Mr. Ruskin's own phraseology, detestable. It may be further objected to the doctrine of our architectural hierophant and legislator, that, besides being devoid of largely intelligent criticism, it inclines too much to mere *materialism*, for he lays very undue stress upon the value of the materials themselves, without regard to aesthetic merit of design ; in which respect his taste is scarcely at all elevated above that of the un-educated and vulgar.

It is for Design to confer upon Material a value of a higher and nobler kind than it possesses in itself, let its market price be what it may ; not for the mere material to recommend and give a certain nominal and conventional worth to design which is undeserving of what is so bestowed upon it. If Brummagem material is to be deprecated, still more so is Brummagem design ; and all the more so in proportion as the material happens to be of good quality. Would folks but pay for it, any Pecksniff would front their houses with marble instead of compo ; and would be infinitely obliged to them also : because the difference of price between the two would be all so much clear profit to him by augmenting commission. Somehow or other, people seem to think, or they talk as if they fancied, that instead of coming out of the bowels of the earth, the stone and marble employed by him came out of an architect's own bowels ; that he spun the materials out of his own body, just as a spider does, and was to be honoured according to their price and preciousness.

Of fictitious or factitious materials most outrageously intolerant, Mr. Ruskin denounces them one and all, not only as unsatisfactory, but as base "lies" and shams, as so many terrible moral delinquencies. To attempt to reason him out of his most virtuous wrath against such enormities would be labour in vain, so he must be left to indulge in it to his heart's content. Some, it is in this instance to be hoped, are a little more lax in their notions of morality, than is the rabidly rigid and fantastically upright or perpendicular Mr. Ruskin; wherefore their ears may be open to what his are firmly closed against. That awfully mastigophorous gentleman may be left to hold up his lash *in terrorem*, it being more likely to make people laugh than to cry; for those who were never guilty of any worse lies and deceptions than those against which he so indignantly inveighs, may go to bed with easy consciences as far as the sin of falsehood is concerned. How he himself can reconcile to his own conscience to impose upon the public and his readers by such rigmarolishly deceptive titles as "Sheepfolds," and those prefixed to some of the chapters of his "Stones of Venice," is to himself best known.

"Go to"—whither I say not, Mr. Ruskin—but "go to. Shall we have no more cakes and ale because thou art virtuous?"—Are we to have no more "graining of doors," no more papier-mâché or carton-pierre ornaments on ceilings?—are we not henceforth to use Keene's cement, or Parian, or stucco, or composition marbles, merely because it pleases you to denounce them as so many "downright and inexcusable lies?"—Now, "Pri'thee, Goody, moderate the rancour of your tongue," and reserve some of your *foul* words for some of the chickens of your own hatching.

That deception is intended, when artificial materials are substituted for those which they imitate, is not to be denied. What then? so far from its being inexcusable, the more complete the deception the greater its merit; and all the greater reason have we to be well satisfied with it, and to admit it as perfectly warrantable and legitimate. There are deceptions of the kind so beautiful in their effect, and executed so skilfully, as to defy detection by any one who is not let into the secret\*; so that, if we are informed what they really are, our admiration is perhaps rather increased than diminished, or transferred from the supposed reality to the delusive imitation.

The facilities afforded by modern substitutes and succedanea have, no doubt, led to a great deal of trumpery and showy display. Yet the abuse and misapplication of a means afford no just ground for decrying that means as chargeable with, and answerable for, the incapacity and bad taste to which it is only passively subservient. Because the means themselves may be of comparatively little cost, they are employed not liberally but far too lavishly, and not unfrequently with so little of decent judgment and tolerable taste, that the result is unqualified paltriness and vulgarity, with not a little of rank absurdity also. There is a sort of flaunting cheap and tawdry look about things of the kind, that might be avoided by merely exercising forbearance in regard to finery, and bestowing more care on design and execution.

\* Not very long ago, the writer saw some scagliola columns in imitation of verde antico, with pilasters behind them, which were only of wood painted and varnished; yet, notwithstanding the immediate comparison thus afforded, the resemblance was so close, that no one would ever have suspected any difference, in regard to material, between the pilasters and the columns.

Most people seem to imagine that any sort of ornament—whatever is meant for such—must at all events be ornament, and, being such, must of course confer beauty on whatever it is applied to for the purpose of beautifying it.

Egregious error! that, and one which Mr. Ruskin himself has not steered clear of—at any rate has not warned his readers against. Although he descants at length—and, as has been shown, in a singularly lackadaisical manner, on the carvings of capitals, and of mouldings, or what he designates “cornices,”—he gives us no instructions or cautions as to the proper application of them in combination with other parts of design. He looks at everything by itself, labels it a specimen, and puts it by into a pigeon-hole of architectural grammar. He gives us an *accidence*, such as it is, but *declines* entering into syntax, under the rather shuffling pretence that composition is not to be taught by express rules; yet, as to that, no more is literary composition to be so taught, yet assuredly, certain guiding principles, elucidated by example, may be laid down for the one just as well as the other. After all, Mr. Ruskin may have acted discreetly in not touching upon the subject of architectural syntax, since it would be exceedingly difficult to reconcile with its simplest and plainest laws such abnormalities as we meet with in his two pet buildings, the Ducal Palace, and St. Mark’s at Venice.

Between a colourist and a colourman the difference is considerable; and it is only the latter character that Mr. Ruskin aspires to—at least, officiates in. He furnishes us with pigments—and of very peregrine quality they are; and he descants on their excellence as glibly as if he were standing behind a counter; but as to the

management and application of them, that belongs not to his business ; so he there leaves us to our own discretion or indiscretion, as it may be : which is the less to be regretted, because when we find him abusing King's College Chapel, Cambridge, the towers of York Minster, and the west window of Winchester Cathedral, on the one hand ; and, on the other, extolling the front of Pisa Cathedral, St. Mark's, and sundry other very queer things, we may very reasonably question his taste, if not his sanity also.

Be his declaiming against the production of ornamental articles by mechanical processes proof of his sanity, of the soundness of his views, or the contrary, indisputable it is that it runs quite counter to general opinion, and practice also. It is a point on which there is something to be said on both sides of the question. The multiplication of specimens in bad taste is most assuredly to be deprecated ; but when articles are produced by wholesale, by thousands and tens of thousands, the very first-rate talent can be employed to design them, and the most diligent study be bestowed on them, at infinitely less cost—in fact, at a merely nominal cost in comparison with that attending the employment of the same talent and study, were each article designed and fabricated separately. And thus a production of real beauty may be diffused as a lesson of taste in quarters where it would else be excluded by its price. A single model will suffice for an indefinite number of transcripts taken from it, and its author—the artist whose taste and ingenuity it exhibits—is himself in a manner multiplied, being rendered equivalent to a hundred or thousand-handed Briareus. It is true, the public do not get his autographs, but they are content with fac-similes of

them ; and surely, in a common-sense view of the matter, the fac-simile of what is intrinsically beautiful is preferable to an inferior original, and the frequency of such fac-similes must conduce to the spread of good taste among the public.

To insist upon manual labour, and that alone, for what can be executed *just as well* without it, or if not exactly without it, with considerably less of it, consequently more speedily and cheaply, is tantamount to asking people to forego the advantages derived from improved means of production. It scarcely differs from telling us that we ought to return to the good old days of the spindle and distaff ; that, with regard to productions of ornamental art and decoration, we ought to place ourselves in the same condition as our forefathers were with regard to books, before the invention of printing. In like manner as an author's manuscript may be said to be his design or model, a designer's model or drawing may be said to be his *manuscript*. Manuscripts, however, cannot be rendered *many*-scripts or scripts for the, many ; and now-a-days almost everything is expected to be for "the many" or "the million"—which two watch-words, or cant-words, are in every body's mouth, except indeed Mr Ruskin's.

He does not write for the many in any way ; for, in the first place, his style is so abstruse and recondite that very few can comprehend his sublime obscurities and hermetically sealed-up meanings ; and in the next, where he condescends to be intelligible, as few can relish his doctrine. Even if they admire, or affect to admire, it as speculation and theory, they will shrink from the idea of carrying it into practice and fairly acting upon it. Here the reader will probably

twit me by asking, Wherefore then, if so I really think, do I take the trouble to oppose opinions which no one is likely to adopt in good earnest? To which ticklish question I reply by another: Does the reader suppose that I am bound to make him my Father Confessor? Still, if he chooses to be suspicious, I will give him leave to suspect that "the trouble" itself is a pleasure. Moreover, if there be no great occasion to write down doctrines that are either impracticable or repulsive, it may not be quite useless to come to the aid of those who disagree with them, yet are unable to meet them by argument; and also to let people see what extravagant and chimerical notions are, not indeed openly sanctioned, but tacitly approved by being connived at. Judging merely by the character which reviewers have, with just one or two exceptions, given of the "Seven Lamps" and the "Stones of Venice," no one would suspect that both those works contain a very great deal that is altogether at variance with, and adverse to, pursuits which we are striving to encourage; much that throws discredit upon our national styles of architecture, and our taste generally; and not a little that must give serious umbrage to the architectural profession collectively, and still more so to some individuals among them. Whatever excuse there may be for other journals, there is none for the shilly-shally timidity and tameness shown by those which profess to keep watch over architecture and art. Most mortifying must it have been to Mr. Ruskin to read—supposing he has done so—the tawdry, puling, namby-pamby criticism (?) on his "Stones of Venice" in the *Art Journal*. An attack may be repelled—an insult resented,—but the impertinence of fawning puppyism can only be kicked aside.

However, I must not let my compassion for Mr. Ruskin get the better of my hostility to his views, his tastes, and his teachings. So, after this digression, interruption, breathing pause, or whatever else it may be called,—and some will probably call it tedious, if not dull also,—I return to the charge.

The author of the "Seven Lamps" exhorts, or rather commands, us not to bestow ornament on things intended for common use ; wherefore, unless he be quite mistaken, our "Great Exhibition" is a mistake of the first magnitude, and will have occasioned a prodigious deal of fuss, not merely to no purpose, but to a very mischievous one. Now, *Utrum horum*, gentlemen, are we to side with—the eloquent Mr. Ruskin or Prince Albert ? The dilemma is a delicate one, for loyalty pulls one way, and admiration of transcendental genius another. Perhaps, then, you had better feel in your pockets and follow the counsel which they may happen to give you. How Mr. Ruskin himself feels, on finding his doctrine not only disregarded, but practically opposed in the highest and most influential quarter, is to himself best known. The most surprising part of the matter is, that so evident a fact should not have been noticed or animadverted upon in any quarter.

The Exhibition will, no doubt, show us a great deal of ornamental work of various kinds, produced either partly or entirely by the agency of machinery or other mechanical processes ; some of the specimens intended, perhaps chiefly if not solely, for architectural purposes, in defiance of Mr. Ruskin's axiom that " machine ornaments are no ornaments at all." He makes the mere *modus operandi* a matter of nearly paramount importance, although most others would hold it to be almost

the very last for consideration. If there be such a *prestige* in manual, how much greater then would there be in *pedal* execution,—in footicraft than in handicraft work. He goes so far as to allow us to make use of ornaments which “common workmen”—or those who are perhaps little better than living biped machines—can execute, but nevertheless prohibits all machine-work itself; and that, as it would seem, not merely because there is no “frankness,” no “heartiness” in it, but no “*heart-breaking*” either. As to that matter of heart-breaking, however, we may get it to our heart’s content; it being enough to break our hearts, and drive us to despair, when we find some of the best opportunities for producing really fine buildings give us what are comparatively mere abortions, and then find those abortions cried up and puffed by those who ought to be most forward and loudest in condemning them.

Insisting upon the evidence of labour as a *sine qua non*, without which no ornamental work, whether in buildings, or anything else, can be satisfactory, Mr. Ruskin supports and illustrates the law he lays down so imperatively by thus apostrophizing his reader: “Be for once a carpenter; make for yourself a table or a chair, and see if ever you thought any table or chair so delightful, and what strange beauty there will be in their crooked limbs!” No doubt of that; for extraordinarily strange, even marvellous, must be beauty that shows itself in the crooked limbs of home-made chairs and tables. However, as we there learn that there may be beauty in bungling, and in deformity itself, we can now account for “the strange beauty” which Mr. Ruskin perceives in Turner’s maddest pictorial freaks. We further learn that, if we want strangely beautiful furni-

ture and upholstery, we have only to manufacture it ourselves, and thereby escape many tradesmen's bills into the bargain. Hardly will Messrs. Gillow relish that notable piece of advice of Mr. Ruskin to his readers; unless they chuckle at it, feeling pretty confident that those who "for once turn carpenter" will *at once* be put out of conceit with their teacher, and break up their own "crooked-limbed" doings for fire-wood.

Evidence of labour! why, if there be any particular merit in that, we may get *quantum suff.* of it in patch-work counterpanes, stitched samplers, home-worked hearth-rugs, and various other products of feminine industry, upon which both time and labour are squandered away, with most busy and fussy do-nothingness. The evidence of labour is but very poor evidence in recommendation of Mr. Ruskin as a philosopher in aesthetics. Nay, it would apply the thumb-screw to him, and compel him to confess that he ought to prefer a mosaic to "a Titian," nay, even to "a Turner;" though rather than do the last he would perhaps suffer his thumb to be screwed off first. What evidence of labour he can find in some of the blurs and blotches framed and exhibited at the Royal Academy by his darling Turner is to most persons an incomprehensible mystery.

No, Mr. John Ruskin; it is not the evidence of labour, but the evidence of artistic mind and sensibility, of aesthetic feeling, taste and judgment, which constitutes the *sine-qua-non* merit in such buildings as claim to be considered works of architecture, and the productions of real architects. Whatever be the excellence or value of the materials employed by him, the architect himself has no share in it; neither has he any in the skilful manual labour of stonemasons, or other operatives, to whom the

execution of the works is confided,—certainly under his superintendence and direction, perhaps, in some degree, under his instruction also ; still their ability is not his, nor let it be ever so great can it make up for his own deficiencies, not to say blunders. Without a good soldier a victory is not to be won ; but the bravest soldiers in the world may be led on only to defeat, if headed by an imbecile and incapable commander, inexpert as a tactician, and without “ head-piece ” as a chief.

If we can tolerate Brummagem design—and that we have and do tolerate it is pretty evident, and not only tolerate but admire it—we surely need not be so lackadaisically *exigéant* and overscrupulous in minor matters as is Mr. Ruskin, who can swallow a camel yet strains at a gnat ; who scans every minutest moulding through a critical lens of the greatest microscopic power, yet is unable to discern either grossly barbarous taste or any other defect in such a heterogeneous medley of monstrosities as the façade of St. Mark's. He lays very undue stress upon detail and individual ornaments, if only because he does so too exclusively, saying scarcely anything at all on the subject of general composition, aggregate effect and *ensemble*, or of character and its various modifications—matters which, though they certainly do not admit of being fully taught by didactic precept alone, afford a fund of remark to any one possessing the requisite grasp of criticism—such as would give attention to the whole, without failing to consider the several component members.

After startling architects, and perhaps their employers too, by saying, in his *Lamps*, that “ ornament cannot be overcharged if it be good,” Mr. Ruskin has now, in his *Reply to Mr. Garbett*, (in the Appendix to the

“Stones of Venice,”) somewhat modified that dictum by explaining that the term “ornament,” as there used by him, is to be interpreted quite differently from either its popular or technical meaning, consequently from that in which he himself usually employs it. We are now told, that by “ornament” we are to understand that which conduces to positive beauty; that “a noble building has never any extraneous or superfluous ornament; that all its parts are necessary to its loveliness, and that no single atom of them could be removed without harm to its life.” No doubt that sounds all very finely, and if it be satisfactory explanation it might just as well have been given in the very first instance, in order to prevent the misconception into which Mr. Garbett, and most probably many others also, have fallen. What Mr. Ruskin has now to explain is how he can possibly reconcile what has just been quoted with his *unique* admiration of St. Mark’s, which is little better than a piece of architectural patchwork—a compilation of odds and ends and scraps of all sorts, very arbitrarily put together. If what conduces not to beauty is not to be accounted ornament, a less ornamented structure is hardly conceivable. Nevertheless Mr. Ruskin is not content with asking us to admire it as merely beautiful, or rich, or as strikingly peregrine in its taste, or as historically interesting; but insists upon our acknowledging its supreme “loveliness,”—the very last quality which any one else would ever think of attributing to it. In direct opposition to every other critic and architectural writer who has spoken of that edifice, he scruples not to call its façade “as lovely a dream as ever filled human imagination!” After that, we must be impressed, if not with admiration of St. Mark’s, with astonishment at Mr.

Ruskin's notions of loveliness ; he being the very first who has ever attributed that quality to an edifice which most others have branded by the epithet ugly, despite the sumptuousness of its materials, and its abundant, yet very unequal, as well as uncouth ornamentation.

It is somewhat of an oversight on the part of Mr. Ruskin, that he has omitted to point out how important it is to pay attention to *KEEPING*—an omission all the more strange because that part of design is so ill understood, or so wilfully disregarded ; at the same time, such omission is all the less extraordinary, and perhaps all the less to be regretted, inasmuch as he himself appears to be either ignorant of or indifferent to it. Were he not, he would not extol, in the outrageous and even *anserous* manner he does, that and one or two other pet buildings of his, which violate keeping and every other principle of design and composition ; they being no better than amorphous in themselves, however curious or noticeable they may be for this bit or that other bit—for a fantastically-carved capital in one place, or a “ frankly ” wrought moulding in another. Rigidly as he scrutinizes every separate item, he never cares to cast them up, and let us know what the “ totle of the whole ” amounts to ; wherein he perhaps shows his discretion, because Art's arithmetic is somewhat different from Cocker's. In the former, two and two do not invariably make four ; on the contrary, half may be greater than the whole—so at least says old Hesiod :

*Νηπιοι ουχ ισασιν οσφ πλεον ἡμισυ παντος.*

In architecture, again, fine feathers do not always make fine birds, even supposing the feathers themselves to be most goodly and unexceptionable ones. However irre-

proachable it may be in itself, ornament, if absurdly or injudiciously applied, may prove no less ridiculous than Mrs. Malaprop's hap-hazard fine words. Although there has been a great deal of vapouring of late about Decorative Art, very few appear really to understand it, or to be able to lay down at all clearly any fixed principles in regard to it. What is most certain is, that they are all Anti-Ruskinites, since they refer us to Cinque-cento and Renaissance, as the most accredited authorities, and most trustworthy guides in all that relates to ornamentation—such at least as is suitable for ourselves at the present day, and which possesses the further recommendation of being kept *Ready-made*!

It is a prevailing, and so far vulgar, error—though rife among those who would shrink from the slightest imputation of vulgarity—that, as the professed purpose of ornament is to beautify in proportion as the quantity of it is increased, so also is increased the degree of beauty aimed at. Thus, what is meant to be more than ordinarily fine generally turns out to be no better than *finical*, if not even worse. An equally gross and grievous mistake is it to suppose, that because ornament happens to be good in itself, it must therefore be satisfactory and produce a good effect irrespectively of the numerous and ever-varying circumstances that have to be considered, and therefore ought to be attended to, in designing any particular work. That which is excellent *in abstracto* may be absurd *in concreto*; what mere precedent may authorize, regard to propriety and artistic treatment may very properly reject as wholly unsuitable to the actual occasion. This ought to be sufficiently obvious, nay, almost self-evident; nevertheless, scarcely any one ever thinks of designing the details of his structures.

Nor would it be difficult to name more than one building by some of our so-called “eminent” architects, in which there is not a single idea of their own of any kind—but merely ready-made, stereotype forms, and hackneyed conventionalities. Of course, those who deal in copyism and plagiarism can quote the authority of precedent for everything they do; but they have little claim to the title of Architect in any more honourable meaning of the word than its every-day signification of a profession or calling. In any other sense the title has become of little worth when we find it can be assumed and sustained by persons who coolly take a plate out of Stuart’s “Athens,” the “Ionian Antiquities,” or whatever other work may suit their purpose, and hand it over to one of their office-clerks to copy it, and to insert the several dimensions actually required; after which it is dubbed a working drawing.

Had Mr. Ruskin raised his voice, and spoken out intelligibly and energetically against the vile system of equally servile and mechanical copying and of MACHINE-DESIGN, he would have rendered Architecture, and perhaps Art in general also, a more essential service than he now has done by inveighing against machine-wrought ornaments. By attacking and fully exposing that system with all its unhappy consequences, he might have laid bare the seat of the malady to which our present “palsied thoughts” are to be ascribed. No wonder that thought should have become palsied, when nearly all didactic writings on Architecture enjoin the student not to presume to **THINK FOR HIMSELF**; but to give himself up implicitly and blindly to established doctrines, authority, and example—in a word, to adopt literally, with regard to his own art, the poet’s creed, “Whatever is, is right;” and not only simply

right, but so right that it cannot be made better, neither can we deviate from it without going completely wrong.

That comfortable doctrine is, however, now completely upset by Mr. Ruskin; because, if we are to believe him,—and he certainly is not sparing of his eloquence,—we ought rather to suppose, that Whatever is, is wrong; that our present theories and notions are fallacious and erroneous; and our practice just as bad, or even worse. His opinion of the latter is on one occasion bolted out rather startlingly, in the cutting phrase of “the idiocies of the present day;”—a most ungracious one in itself, and one moreover that does not come with the best imaginable grace from the out-and-out admirer of Turner. Something akin to idiocy may also be detected in many of his own crotchety dicta; as, for instance, in the following exquisite bit of rigmarole:—

“ We cannot all have our gardens now, nor our pleasant fields to meditate in at eventide. Then, the function of our architecture is, as far as may be, to replace these; to tell us about nature; to possess us with memories of her quietness; to be solemn and full of tenderness,” and so forth. Now, certes, Mr. Ruskin is the greatest of discoverers, he having discovered that it is “the function of architecture” to replace green gardens and pleasant fields,—perhaps by covering them over with bricks and mortar. Surely he must there have been laughing at his readers; unless, out of pure good nature, he was determined to make them laugh at him.

He either affects or is himself affected by a *nature-mania* so extraordinary as to be preternatural and perhaps supernatural also,—so hyperbolic as to overshoot the mark. When he was about it, Mr. Ruskin might as well have told us that it is “the function” of roast beef

to replace and remind us of primæval acorns, as it would not have been a whit more nonsensical or mawkishly maudlin than the stuff he has given utterance to. Perhaps, however, he eschews roast beef, and adopts an Abyssinian or omophagous diet, as being more *au naturel*.

However intimate Mr. Ruskin may be with nature, he most assuredly understands very little of the nature of Architecture, or of architectural ornament either, when he tells that its "forms and ideas ought to be directly taken from natural objects," and that "forms which are *not* taken from such *must* be ugly"!! Verily the teacher of such notable doctrine has not to look far about him to find one of "the idiocies of the present day."

*Apropos* to those same idiocies, he, no doubt, takes the Exhibition scheme and the Crystal Palace to be foremost among them, inasmuch as they declare practical defiance to, and rejection of, one main article of Ruskinism ; viz., not to bestow ornament on things intended for common use. It is true, he has not had the courage to repeat that advice and enforce it with all the might of his eloquence, now that it seems more than ever required—I had nearly said, called for, though that it certainly is not ; still, as he says nothing to the contrary, it is to be presumed that he clings as firmly as ever to that original and unique point of his theory. Or if, upon reflection, he now tacitly abandons it as untenable, further reflection would, perhaps, lead him to give up one by one so many others of his peculiar notions and opinions, that his system would fall to pieces. He might chance, for instance, to find out that forms directly taken from natural objects may be not only ugly but absurd . also, and *vice versa*, that others which are *not* may be both appropriate and beautiful. He might also come to

perceive that our English Perpendicular is not so *very* detestable after all ;—that Renaissance is not always “ lascivious,” nor so formidably “ pestilent,” as he declares it to be ; that the “ dissolute dulness ” of English Flamboyant need not excite moral indignation against it ; that matters of architecture and taste are not exactly matters of conscience ; and that, be it ever so “ eloquent,” the fierce denunciation of the artifices and hypocrisies resorted to by architects, as no better than so many shocking violations of morality and truth, is little less than supremely ridiculous, and may be suspected of being hypocritical also. Such eloquence and morality are too much in the Mawworm strain.

I could easily say a very great deal more, but the reader is nodding already ; so I take the hint at once, and give him leave to call for his

NIGHTCAP,

or what some, who are either more eloquent or more delicate than myself, would paraphrastically call the Nocturnal Envelope of a man’s Upper Story.













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